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Author(s): Emanuele Antonelli
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Little Red Riding Hood

Victimage in Folktales and Cinema—A Case Study

Emanuele Antonelli

Università degli Studi di Torino, Italy

In this paper we attempt to interpret Little Red Riding Hood's most famous variants in light of its recent film adaptations. With reference to René Girard's theory of sacrifice, we will argue that the latest one of these, Catherine Hardwicke's 2011 adaptation offers the chance to see in Perrault's "Little Red Riding Hood" the result of a diachronical evolution in four steps of the misrecognizing narration of a collective lynching, a full-fledged scapegoating of an anonymous villager accused and persecuted as werewolf. We will find further support in Vladimir Propp's and Alan Dundes's contributions.

Cui prodest scelus, is fecit.

—Seneca, *Medea*, act 3, verses 500–501

It is often said that the story of Little Red Riding Hood began as a folktale told to young children by European mothers and nurses.[1] The fable, in its many oral variants, then came to the attention of Charles Perrault, a French attorney, poet, writer, and anthologist, who published the first written version in a collection of fairy tales that later became a French

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classic. As many versions had preceded it, many others followed, including the most famous one, collected by the Brothers Grimm.

Perrault tells the story of a little village girl called *Le Petit Chaperon Rouge* after a red cape her grandmother had given her and that she loved to wear. Her mother asks her to take to her grandmother some biscuits and butter in a nearby village, beyond the forest. Walking through the woods, Little Red Riding Hood meets a friendly wolf who asks her where she is headed. After being told about the house, the wolf fools the little girl, saying he'll go there too, but by a different route, and they'll see who gets there first. The wolf runs fast and arrives well before the girl, fools the grandmother by feigning to be Little Red Riding Hood, and then devours her and crawls into bed. When the girl arrives, he simulates the grandmother's voice, telling her to come to bed. The girl undresses and does as she is told. The famous dialogue follows: "What great arms you have, Grandma!" "The better to embrace you with, my child." "What great legs you have!" "The better to run with, my child." "What great ears!" "The better to hear with." "What great eyes!" "The better to see you with." "What great teeth!" "The better to eat you with." The wolf eats the girl up and the story ends.

A little more than a century later, the German brothers Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm published a new collection of fairy tales with a few variations, including the story of Little Red Riding Hood with its very interesting and well-known happy ending: The mother gives to Little Red Riding Hood a cake and a bottle of wine, and once the girl arrives at her grandmother's house, even though fooled by the disguised wolf, she doesn't climb in the bed. After the famous dialogue, she is swallowed, but then something follows. Once the wolf has completed the hearty lunch, he falls asleep and starts snoring. A passing hunter hears the loud snores and, surprised that such a noise could come from an old woman's house, goes inside to investigate, finds the wolf, and right when he is about to shoot it, he realizes that the wolf may have eaten the two women. So the hunter pulls out a sharp knife and cuts open the wolf's tummy, out of which both Little Red Riding Hood and the grandmother come, unharmed. With the wolf being still asleep, they bring some big stones into the house and put them inside the wolf; when he wakes up and tries to get away, the heavy stones drag him down and he drops dead. As if she had learned the lesson of Perrault's too-explicit moral, Little Red Riding Hood says to herself, "I will never again wander off into the forest nor talk to a stranger as long as I live, when my mother forbids it."

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Countless comments, deconstructions, and interpretations of this well-known and widespread tale have been put forward during the last century,[2] and most of them eventually argue for or at least from its modern moral: children should obey their parents when they walk through dangerous areas, and beware of seemingly friendly strangers, because *wolves may lurk in every guise*. One of the leading, most powerful and fruitful hermeneutic methods ever conceived, psychoanalysis, has been applied to the reading of this folktale, as it has been applied to famous myths and many other literary genres. Of course many folklorists have dedicated much effort to it, and feminist thought made its breakthrough in the field, too. Most of the more influential readings of the tale have been the object of a precise and exhaustive survey led and edited by Alan Dundes,[3] yet we will see that, in trying to answer two essential sets of questions, something more can be said about it: What is the tale about? And, above all, has it always been about the same thing? Who is the main character? What does the narrative matter stem from?

As for the psychoanalysis-inspired interpretations, even naming only the most famous ones, we could list quite a number of works, starting with Freud himself,[4] then on to Otto Rank and Carl G. Jung or Erich Fromm, who wrote the famous *The Forgotten Language: An Introduction to the Understanding of Dreams, Fairy Tales, and Myths*,[5] and ending with Bruno Bettelheim, who devoted more than one essay to Little Red Cap,[6] and after whom not many new insights have emerged.[7] As Bettelheim himself said, psychoanalytical interpretations are often received with suspicion because "different psychoanalysts propose entirely different interpretations of the same fairy tales";[8] yet there is one thing on which they agree: Little Red Riding Hood is not as innocent and pure as she may seem to those who read the Brothers Grimm variant or are familiar with cartoon adaptations. Little Red Riding Hood is not so much a pretty little girl as a young woman experiencing profound sexual impulses. She wants to grow and open herself to the pleasures of life; she is driven to follow the wolf and crawl into bed with him by her own desires. She is not innocent, yet still she is in danger; that is why she needs to be told that wolves—and men—are dangerous even if they look attractive. In many ways, according to a psychoanalytical reading, "Little Red Riding Hood" is what we could call a *Bildungmärchen*, a formation tale, and the moral, whether focusing on sexual impulses or on other dangers, still supposedly offers a clear lesson to young girls.[9] Other interpretations were put forward in the twentieth century, trying to deconstruct the tale; some, bringing to the extreme the sexual theme, saw in

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it a popular tale about the risks of prostitution, others read in it the remainder of ancient late medieval stories of cannibalism, others just reduced it to an exemplary story to teach kids to beware of wolves—which is quite absurd because if wolves were a real problem, children should have been well aware of them without any need for the teachings of the tale. Yet none of the known interpretations of this tale—at least to my knowledge—ever puts in doubt the essential distribution of roles: Little Red Riding Hood—either innocent or secretly and unconsciously driven by sexual impulses—is the main character and the story is happening *to* her.[10] On this implicit and never questioned presupposition, Bettelheim and Fromm, for example, base their different but similar interpretations of the sexual implications of the tale. On this same assumption, many saw in it the narration of a female rite of passage,[11] much as Vladimir Propp implicitly did in his influential *The Historical Roots of the Wonder Tale*,[12] openly drawing inspiration on the works of the famous French folklorist Paul Saintyves.[13] My intuition, largely based on Girard's reading of myths and other texts, is that some of the details upon which most of the interpretations focus—for instance, the candid instructions of Little Red Riding Hood's mother (don't break the bottle of wine!),[14] or that despite being told not to lose time the girl wanders around picking flowers,[15] or the color of the cap,[16] and even the very same moral proposed by Perrault—should be considered as minor; some of them are later interpolations introduced,[17] in a couple of centuries of children's books, to sanitize a story that may be much more intriguing and disturbing than we are used to thinking.

Leaving aside for a moment psychoanalytical interpretations, one can find in more recent literature interesting analysis of our tale. For example, Catherine Orenstein, in her *Little Red Riding Hood Uncloaked*,[18] quickly brushes past the cannibalistic theme quite explicit in many variants of the tale but abundantly digs in to everything connected to all those anxieties about gender problems, identity and sexuality issues, and violence against women at large one could work through using an updated reading of such a tale. She goes through a number of variants, taking into consideration the construction of gender and the fluctuating and flexible sexual roles portrayed. Orenstein is mostly interested in a sort of feminist reading, reactualizing in many ways the reading of Jack Zipes, whose aim was to refine from later male interpolations—such as those of *Monsieur* Charles Perrault and *Herr* Jacob and *Herr* Wilhelm Grimm—a female tale, focusing therefore also on those modern adaptations where the sense of female authority resurfaces. Following a quite similar insight, I will now focus on

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the ritualistic readings of the tale, looking for those recent adaptations in which something maybe unexpected resurfaces.

According to Alan Dundes, "ritual or myth-ritual interpretations . . . are of two types."[19] The first type sees in the tale of Little Red Riding Hood a metaphor of the natural cycles; for example, that of death and rebirth of the sun: the red cap in this interpretation would then stand for the sunset (or sunrise), the red light of the sun being eaten up by the ferocious night and then coming out of it for a new day. Others focus on the hood, interpreting it as the crown of the princess of May,[20] conveying the metaphor of the summer getting out of the winter's belly. On the other hand, there are the rites of passage already cited on which I will concentrate later. The problem of every myth-ritual interpretation is always the same: What kind of knowledge does it bring to find a myth or a rite beyond a tale? Can we say we are closer to its *origin*? In other words, "folktale may stem from rituals, but what is then the ultimate origin of the generating ritual?"[21]

In what follows I will try to answer this particular question; to do so, of the aforementioned two types of interpretation, I will lean on Propp's and Saintyves's essential intuition. As a methodological premise of my argument, it is important to recall that Girard's mimetic theory and all its appropriate applications never aim to define the precise historical origin, in time and space, of a myth or a tale. It may seem inappropriate to speak in terms of *origin*, yet what a Girardian approach can shed light on is the *logical structure* and the anthropological *type* of event that may lie concealed in a tale.

We are told, even if it is only implicitly (Propp is referring in general to certain items of the tale, e.g., the "house in the forest"), that the easiest reading of the journey of Little Red Riding Hood is to interpret it as the narration of an initiation rite. Almost everywhere in the world where woods were around, this type of rite used to be performed in the middle of a forest and was usually based on the mise-en-scène of a death and rebirth sequence. Commonly, the child to be initiated would experience being swallowed by some sort of monster and would then come out of the beast, reborn, as a new individual, a new adult member of the clan or community.[22] As it is easy to see, this interpretation fits the tale quite precisely. Little Red Riding Hood is ready to grow, with everything that this will imply—sexual impulses included. Her mother is not thoughtlessly sending her little child into a dangerous forest; she sends her to the old woman who will perform the rite. The wolf is not a real menace; it is the symbolic ritual procedure to become a woman. Most of the essential narrative elements make sense in

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this scenario. But if this is a good path to pursue, one could go further and speculate on Perrault's version being nothing but a diachronically later version than the Brothers Grimm one:[23] the *ritual* element of the mythic sequence has been "sterilized" and forgotten, and what's left is just an exemplary sad story that happened to an imprudent girl,[24] rearranged to make sense of a rite that nobody was by then able to understand. When the ritual matter disappears, supposedly *universal* explanations come along: the wolf is the man who takes Little Red Riding Hood's virginity.[25] There is no need for other arguments to accept that this tale can be interpreted as a later narration of a initiation rite: every detail manifestly fits in Propp's schema, and many other scholars have already dedicated their efforts to this argument. Notice that this is not intended as an argument against the psychoanalytical interpretations nor against common sense; my goal is not to prove Bettelheim wrong or to show that Perrault's moral is superficial but to try and understand if anything more than this lies at the bottom of this famous tale.

Following Propp, we can try to see if there is anything else to say about a ritualistic interpretation of this tale. Given the narrative material offered by the Brothers Grimm version, one could find in Propp's schema something more: the Russian folklorist tells us that the figure of the hero can be interpreted as a sort of milestone in the diachronical evolution of a tale. Taking for granted the simple and yet highly controversial idea of the presence of human sacrifices in ancient cultures, Propp puts forward the hypothesis that the role of the hero is a response to a later feeling of uneasiness of a community interpreting as intolerable the very idea of human sacrifice. This is quite relevant to my point: we should never forget that the quintessential feature of folklore is precisely its possibility to change over the generations, adapting to every historical context.[26] In a culture, or in a time that still needed human sacrifice to cope with adversities,[27] someone saving a girl from being offered as a sacrifice to some sort of sacred beast would have been considered as a "wicked man,"[28] putting the whole community in danger. But when the need is overcome, the rite changes and the wicked man is turned into a hero: he helps to make sense of something intolerable to the new sensitivity and eventually to forget it. Here comes the rite of passage.

Applying this hypothesis to Little Red Riding Hood, we can easily detect three different levels of diachronical evolution. Perrault's version would represent the oblivious reduction of a myth to a simple exemplary individualistic sad story. Little Red Riding Hood is just an imprudent girl

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led to a sad destiny. According to ritualistic readings, such as that of Saintyves, our tale is instead the narration of an initiation rite: Little Red Riding Hood is every single child of the village going through a death and rebirth sequence to become an adult member of the community. Following Propp's insight, we can see in the initiation rite an interpretation of an older and more violent form of rite: a girl being offered as human sacrifice to a beast living in the forest. According to Propp's hypothesis then, the hero—in our tale, the hunter—is the "wicked man" who inverts the rite, saves the girl, and represents the new birth in the rite of passage. Or, in other words, he is the semiotic solution to get over the uneasiness of a tale about human sacrifice. In the Italian version of this tale, *La finta nonna*,[29] a quite different ending suggests that we are on a promising path: the little girl needs no hunter to save her. Instead, she fools the wolf with an intelligent substitution. The Italian tale goes like this: When asked to get to bed, the girl answers, "Grandmother, I can't sleep if I don't go to the bathroom." The grandmother says, "Go down in the stable, I'll drop you down with a rope and then bring you back up here." She tied her and dropped her in the barn. As soon as she felt the ground under her feet, the girl untied herself and tied up a sheep to the rope. "Are you done?" asked the Grandmother. "Wait a second, Granny," answered the little girl as she was tying the sheep. "There you go, pull me up."

As in many myths analyzed by Girard—as, for example, in Nemo and the Cyclops's scene from *The Odyssey*—such a tale does not put in doubt the essential sacrificial feature of the original plot but produces a *substitution* to reduce the feeling of uneasiness: no human sacrifice, no cannibalism, just an ogre (the fake grandmother) eating a sheep, or "gobbl[ing] up a large stone."[30] "A splendidly executed ruse enables the hero to escape the clutches of a monster";[31] in this variant, the hero is the girl herself, pretty much as is the case with Ulysses. Notice that with this reading our path is splitting away from that which Zipes and Orenstein pursued: the theme of the girl saving herself is not supposed to show any sort of female autonomy or even authority, nor to contest any male chauvinism, but to cover up or ignore the human sacrifice theme. She would have been the *wicked and selfish woman* putting all the community in jeopardy to save herself. After some time, she is the one who turned a human sacrifice into an animal sacrifice, substituting a sheep for herself. All of this is rather obvious, or at least it has already been the object of numerous comments and interpretations, therefore I will not further elaborate on it. I will just focus on the notion of substitution.

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Once one approaches such a story with Girardian lenses, a precise schema starts to emerge, and it allows further speculation on the possible origin of our tale. Girard turned the study of myths into a sort of highly entertaining thriller; to solve it he teaches us not to ask *cui prodest*? (to whose benefit?) but where is the victim? or better, *who is the real victim*? Little Red Riding Hood in this sense may be a perfect case study for Girard's analysis.

For more than three centuries, every reader or listener has been identifying with the poor little girl being fooled and swallowed by a monstrous wolf and saved by a hero, the hunter. She is the main character and the victim of brutal aggression; everybody feels connected to her, and that is of course essential for every moralistic interpretation to make sense. We need to live the tale through the eyes of Little Red Riding Hood to understand the risk of misbehaving. We need to fear for her life as if it were our own to learn what *wolves may lurk in every guise* could mean to ourselves. This same assumption would also be essential for a rite of passage: the individual growing up, the child becoming adult, is Little Red Riding Hood, and if we have to believe that this tale is the narration of a rite of passage, then we must believe that the main character of the story, the one showing all the children of a village their path for growth, is Little Red Riding Hood. If we give credit to Propp's hypothesis, this character may have been, in a more distant past, the victim of a propitiatory or apotropaic rite, which, according to Girardian analysis, is even the very origin of subjectivity.[32] The individual going through the rite is the first subject of the history of mankind. Nevertheless, in this case, according to Girard's hypothesis,[33] she also should be considered as a substitute victim.

At first, one could think that the victim of a sacrifice is a substitute for the whole community, offering a part of itself to itself, but according to mimetic theory,[34] the victim of an instituted rite is itself a substitute for something that lies concealed in the diachronical evolution of the narrative and performative matter. So, who is the victim a substitute for? Will the answer to this question help us to get closer to our aim? We will argue that the genealogy of the rite hiding behind the curtain of this juvenile tale must proceed from something similar to a collective scapegoating.[35]

As Dundes noted, the great interest and power of folklore is that it changes and adapts to individuals and groups in which it circulates, "it continues on its often merry way from raconteur to raconteur, from generation to generation."[36] Sometimes it also happens that old and apparently forgotten themes come to the surface again, maybe unnoticed.

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One of these is definitely lycanthropy. Most of the recent film adaptations flirted with werewolves, such as *The Company of Wolves*, directed by Neil Jordan in 1984 and inspired by Angela Carter's short story,[37] or the 1989 musical *Red Riding Hood* starring Isabella Rossellini,[38] not to mention Randal Kleiser 2006 *Red Riding Hood* comic movie.[39] Nevertheless, the most intriguing adaptation of all those implying a werewolf is Catherine Hardwicke's from 2011. In the words of Leonardo Di Caprio, producer and creator of the movie, the plot of the film is a "Gothic twist on Red Riding Hood, with the wolf being a werewolf, . . . a cool, sexy romantic thriller."[40] The director declared, in an interview with the *Los Angeles Times,* that they "stayed true to the oldest telling of the stories in a lot of ways";[41] still one may object that the film's rendering of the tale is not another variant of it but a different story that happens to have the same name—a hard question to cope with. A few decades ago, Umberto Eco stated the most reasonable interpretation of hermeneutics: it's not easy to determine if something is a correct or legitimate interpretation of a text, but surely it is easier to understand if something is not legitimate or correct, and this cannot be said about Hardwicke's movie. The girl still goes into the forest to take food and wine to the grandmother, who still gets killed by the wolf. In doing so, Little Red Riding Hood still wanders off the path to pick flowers and right before (instead of right after) being taken by the wolf is saved by a woodcutter (and not a hunter), who kills the wolf and fills its belly with stones.

If considered as one more variant of the tale, one that reached almost 10 million people, the only part of this film that would matter is the plot. Accordingly, in what follows I won't try to argue that this movie is anything better than a kitsch blockbuster (it would be easy to argue that in many ways, so were the tales).[42] I will not devote much time or effort to comment on the script or the visuals because, at least to my account, they do not deserve any particular attention: this movie is not a work of art in any aesthetic meaning of the word. Catherine Hardwicke is just another raconteur, and her adaptation will be considered as if it was just one more anonymous variant collected by a folklorist. In other words, I will consider this movie as a product of popular culture, as a folkloric item, to see if it is playing some sort of cultural role, or at least conveying meanings customarily found in other folkloric forms, such as the fairy tale.[43] The script has some few relevant changes—mainly inspired by psychoanalytical interpretations— but they don't falsify the essential plot of the tale, just as the Brothers Grimm addendum did not; instead, they somehow bring to the surface a couple of relevant elements. I will focus on the plot and provide

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comments to show that the many details it sums in a fascinating mixture of psychoanalytical and Hollywood clichés can actually tell us something about the most hidden and almost forgotten *structure* of the tale of Little Red Riding Hood. Here follows a commented summary.[44]

> Once upon a time in Daggerhorn, a village on the edge of a forest plagued by a werewolf, there was a young and beautiful woman whose name was Valerie. She lived in the village with her parents, Cesaire and Suzette, and an elder sister, Lucie, and she was in love with the woodcutter Peter. Yet her parents had arranged for her to marry Henry Lazar, the son of the wealthy blacksmith Adrien Lazar. Valerie and Peter decide to run away together, but they learn that the wolf broke its truce not to prey on the townspeople in exchange for cattle sacrifices. The wolf murders Lucie, who had a crush on Henry Lazar.

The sacrificial tone is quite explicit in the film adaptation: the very first scene, a flashback of Valerie's childhood, presents a little pig being offered as sacrifice to the sacred beast, which is not just a wolf but a werewolf. We find here the first element that usually turns on a Girardian interest: a community plagued by a monster that requires sacrifices to contain its violence. David Leslie Johnson, the author of the screenplay, has done something crucial in transforming the tale's wolf into a werewolf:[45] he turned an exogenous danger—a beast, representing *nature*—into an endogenous danger—an exceptional man. The first line pronounced by Valerie—"Few knew our village by name, but many had heard of the terrible things that happened there"—and, as we will see, the last one—"To live apart carries its own dangers. But of those I am less afraid"—may be considered as hints about this same issue. A werewolf can be interpreted as a symbol of undifferentiation because of its unclear and undefined nature: it/he is both an animal and a man, so, in a certain way, he tears apart the social and metaphysical structure of a community that finds itself without a clear definition of its limits. The reference points are blurred, a girl has been killed, fear and desperation start to spread, and the crisis begins. But this is not all. We are given other interesting details.

> Valerie's mother learns of Peter and her daughter and decides to tell Valerie that when she was young she too did not love her husband at first but another man instead, but later she learned to love him. In the meantime, Father Auguste, the local priest, calls the famous werewolf hunter Father Solomon to help them, but the townspeople decide not to wait and dash into the wolf's lair to destroy it. During the hunt, a wolf attacks and murders Adrien, but then it is cornered by the men and

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> killed. Valerie sees Suzette mourning Adrien and realizes that he must have been her ancient love. She also understands that Lucie, being the elder daughter, should have been the first to wed. If her parents did not offer Lucie to Henry, it must be because she was the illegitimate daughter of Adrien, therefore Henry's half sister.

Jealousy and rivalry between two sisters were about to explode, an old crime is pulled out of oblivion to prevent the community being upset by an incestuous love, and a girl is killed. Both at a collective and at an individual level, the movie presents a community in crisis, torn apart: by brushing away the clear distinction between what is human and what is animal, the threatening presence of the werewolf undoes the *metaphysical structure of the community*. The risked incest and the consummated cheating have confused the structure of kinship.

> Father Solomon arrives and explains that the men had just killed a regular wolf, because, had they killed the werewolf, it would have returned to its human form. He also reveals that the Blood Moon Week, an astrological event that happens every 13 years, had begun. During this period of seven days, whoever is bitten by a werewolf will become one as well. The people do not believe a single word Father Solomon has told them and decide to celebrate the slaying of the wolf with a great masquerade party.

The description of the crisis is enriched with two crucial elements—in the first place, the people celebrate with a *masked* party; then, the Blood Moon introduces the typical theme of contagion. Anyone, regardless of status, gender, wealth, or health, will contract the horrible disease if bitten. The *masked* party itself introduces the theme of the carnival when every social and hierarchical structure is turned upside down; in addition, it gives us the chance to reinterpret the numerous disguises of the tale's wolf as an other symbol of undifferentiation. The theme of contagion and that of the disguising are typical symbols of what Girard called the *crisis of undifferentiation*: a contagious disease can tear down social, parental, and hierarchical structures because it strikes arbitrarily; the poor and the rich, the young and the old, the child and the parent, the healthy and the ill—all can be killed, without any difference. In the carnival and the disguises, everybody can be anybody—there is no difference among them, no point of reference. The movie's interpretation of the tale and the tale itself present the perfect Girardian situation: during a crisis of undifferentiation there is an element of the puzzle that displays certain features that may turn it into a possible center of the structure, the

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operator of undifferentiation and, therefore, at the same time a new clear difference. As the Italian semiotician Stefano Calabrese recalls, the tale is "hostile to everything that is shapeless and crumbled";[46] to convey the sense of shapelessness and at the same time bring it back to a sort of recognizable form, the tale eventually creates—as every myth does, according to Girard—a differentiated symbol of undifferentiation.[47]

The wolf can disguise himself; he can become anyone he wants. The wolf is contagious; he can turn anyone into one of his kind. More interested in sexy elements of psychoanalyst readings, Hardwicke is nonetheless somehow induced by the plot itself to introduce sacrificial details. Besides, even if we get only a glimpse at it, the masked party is actually a sacrificial rite. We can catch a glimmer—and Hardwicke's interview lingers on it— of an effigy of the wolf being burned, with everyone dancing like crazy and partying and going wild around the huge bonfire. Yet, following the events, we realize that the rite has failed.

> During the party, Father Solomon's men, led by the captain, seal Daggerhorn off and begin to look for the werewolf. The werewolf attacks; all the villagers run into the church (as the werewolf cannot step on holy ground) but Valerie and her friend Roxanne, who stay outside to look for Roxanne's autistic brother, Claude. The wolf finds them but does not hurt them; instead, it telepathically communicates with Valerie and threatens to kill Roxanne and destroy the village if Valerie doesn't leave with it. This said, the werewolf runs away, vowing to return to learn Valerie's decision.

As in every such critical situation, when a community is prey to panic, *differences* need to be restored: a crisis asks for some *krinein*, judgments and decisions are needed, and summary justice begins to be applied. Father Solomon, assuming the lead of the improvised tribunal, addresses the people with a memorably twisted speech: "The wolf lives here, in this village, among you. The real killer could be your neighbor. Your best friend, even your wife." These words don't restore differences but tear them down completely, for new ones to find space: no proximity can be safe, no affection, no parental bond can be trusted. Suspicion rapidly spreads all around, and everyone starts to suspect everyone else. Yet, the statement that, in my opinion, commands the whole film adaptation and makes it a matter for a Girardian analysis is uttered a few scenes later by the captain, in a conversation with Father Solomon: "We must find it, in its human form. But how? *It could be any of them*." Father Solomon's instructions reveal much about his true faith: "Look for the signs. Isolation. Witchcraft. The

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black arts. Abnormal behavior. Strange smells." This statement sums up the essential features of the sacrificial logic: *it could be any of them* may be, in its vagueness, a precise descriptive piece of information looking to the past, uttered by a supposedly realist detective, meaning that the culprit can be found in any guise; or it could look to the future, being uttered by a constructivist detective, meaning that it does not matter who we accuse and persecute: *anyone will do*—we just need to accuse and persecute someone and the crisis will subside. At this point, screenwriter Johnson adds one more coup de théâtre: the first victim of the summary trials is killed in a very singular way.

> Father Solomon's men capture Claude. Since he had performed a card trick earlier, the werewolf hunter claims Claude must be a student of the dark arts and forces the frightened Claude to unveil the wolf's identity. Since Claude does not match his expectations, Father Solomon locks him up in an iron elephant brazen bull. Roxanne then tells everybody that she had seen Valerie communicating with the wolf, hoping that this will save her brother's life, but when they open the bull, they find Claude dead.

Such a hunt, terribly similar to a witch hunt, soon gives its results. Roxanne's autistic brother, the village idiot, is accused with these words: "His speech is twisted. He communes with demons. He has studied the black arts. He's a conjurer." On the other hand, he also was the most *expendable* villager: he was autistic, he had no role in Daggerhorn, he was more a problem than a resource, he won't be missed that much, *nor avenged*. Claude is locked up in a large elephant-shaped brazen bull and left to roast to death.[48] Just as in an initiation rite, Claude is swallowed by a giant beast; however, he eventually does not get out unharmed, reborn, but instead dies. Again, in a very frightening sequence of persecutory clichés, once the child is dead, Father Solomon says, "We do this for a greater good." Thanks to Roxanne's informing, the hunt goes on. Here is her accusation of Valerie: "She can climb the tallest trees. She can run faster than all the other girls. She wears a red cloak. The devil's color," a pure and clear outburst of envy to which a seemingly absurd and superfluous accusation is added: "And she can talk to werewolves," absurd and superfluous in every situation except that in which people believe in werewolves.

> Father Solomon is convinced that Valerie must be a witch and, after having captured her, he displays the young woman at the town's square to bait the wolf and kill it.

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Something happens; as Father Solomon the inquisitor is encouraging the people to offer Valerie to the werewolf—"The wolf wants her, not you. If you wish to save yourselves, simply give it what it wants"—the voice of Henry Lazar interrupts him: "You can't give her to the wolf. That's human sacrifice." Henry is aware that offering Valerie to the sacred beast would be a human sacrifice, because the village used to offer cattle as animal sacrifices. Father Solomon is ready to turn the substitution process upside down: if offering animals does not satisfy the wolf anymore, it means we have to give it something more precious.

The director spreads other details of what, with Girard, I am calling *crisis of undifferentiation*. Henry's mother, who is Adrien's widow, interrupts her son. She looks at Valerie, the daughter of the lover of her unfaithful dead husband, with scorn and says: "We all do sacrifices." Valerie is taken to the altar, where cattle were offered to the wolf, and forced to wear a mask of public disgrace.[49] The spectator is put in Valerie's situation, living the scene through Valerie's mask: "My friends stared, judging me"; and then we see a friend of Valerie's approaching her with seemingly good intentions, to bring Roxanne's apologies. Suddenly her speech turns into a brutal accusation that looks again as a violent outburst of satisfied *resentment*: "You won't fool me anymore. You were always too good. Too pretty. Too perfect. You tricked us. Now you're gonna get what you deserve."

> Henry and Peter put aside their discord and help Valerie to escape. During the getaway Peter is caught by the captain and thrown into the brazen bull, while Father Solomon sentences Henry to death for helping Valerie. Father Auguste saves Henry but is killed by Father Solomon.

A terrible outburst of internal violence follows, and the sequence of killings gets longer and longer. Everyone who tries to stop it gets caught in the meshes of this infernal net.

> Henry takes Valerie to the church. The wolf attacks again and bites off Father Solomon's hand, which had silver-coated fingernails. This time the people protect Valerie from the wolf, who, trying to get Valerie, touches the holy ground of the church yard, burning his paw. Valerie dreams that the wolf is her grandmother and decides to go and check on her, in her house in the woods. Father Solomon, having been bitten during the Blood Moon, is cursed and therefore killed by the captain.

The scene of Father Solomon's death is even more interesting: during the first attack of the beast the captain's brother had been bitten and cursed,

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and Father Solomon had pitilessly killed him in front of the captain. This time, the reverse happens: Father Solomon, having been bitten, according to his own rules must be killed. We see the captain killing him in a spirit of revenge and regret, which emerges when he says, twice, "A bitten man is a cursed man." Violence is the disease of a community burning with envy and desire for vengeance. This idea is proffered at the very beginning of the film by Valerie's father, who, when Father Auguste tells the villagers he had called Father Solomon to get rid of the beast, disputes: "No, he will rob us of our vengeance." That is precisely what the beast is: their desire for vengeance.

> Valerie fetches Father Solomon's hand and then rushes to her grandmother's house. On the way she meets Peter and notices that his hand is burned in the same place where the wolf burned its paw, so she assumes Peter is the wolf and stabs him. Arriving at her grandmother's house, Valerie finds her dead and learns that the wolf is her father, Cesaire.

In this scene we have a hidden reference to both the most known and some of the most frightening variants of our tale. Little Red Riding Hood is welcomed by her grandmother and offered some soup, looking (according to Valerie's reaction), quite different than the other soups seen in the previous scenes in the grandmother's house.[50] Then, as she asks what she is eating, the grandmother starts getting undressed and we see Valerie's father emerging from the grandmother's clothes.

> Cesaire tells his daughter the story of his curse, passed to him by his own father. He also reveals that he intended to leave the village but wanted to take his children with him. That is why he sent a note to Lucie pretending to be Henry so as to meet her alone at night and pass her the family "gift." However, since he couldn't communicate with her, he realized that she was not his daughter and then murdered her in a fit of rage. He avenged himself by killing his wife's lover and now wants Valerie to accept the curse, but she refuses. Meanwhile, Peter arrives and fights Cesaire, who bites him and pushes him aside, but Peter throws an axe into Cesaire's back. Valerie stabs Cesaire with Father Solomon's silver-coated fingernails and kills him. Valerie and Peter take some big stones into the house, put them inside the wolf, and dump the body in the river. Peter leaves to learn how to control his curse, vowing to return when he will be sure not to hurt Valerie. She then moves to her grandmother's house, leaving her youth behind.

The last sentence spoken in the film hints at something that supports my interpretation: "To live apart carries its own dangers. But of those I am less

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afraid." Just as a confirmation of the same insights brought the screenplay author to turn the wolf into a werewolf, Valerie says that the dangers coming from inside a community are more frightening than those coming from outside: better to face a wolf than a panicking village. Better to confront a clear and *differentiated* menace than to fight against the multifarious dangers of an undifferentiated community.

Having in mind Girard's and, even more precisely, Arthur Hocart's analyses on the origins and genealogy of rites,[51] we can now try to answer to the question asked earlier: Is there anything behind the curtain of this tale? Is it just about a young girl misbehaving? Is it even just about a girl who wants to grow older and become a woman? Does Catherine Hardwicke's film adaptation add anything to other variants of the tale?

I will apply to the analysis of this corpus of texts (the different variants of the tale and the film adaptation) the same interpretative tools René Girard has applied in his unbinding of Oedipus.[52] As Girard showed, we can follow psychoanalytical interpretation and be misled by boudoir pruderies and so believe in Oedipus's guilt and then, as Bettelheim does, apply such a logical model to the analysis of Little Red Riding Hood, or we can try to listen seriously to the absurd accusations he is prosecuted for and scrutinize them seriously. Following a Freudian inspiration we may try to find in Little Red Riding Hood the "reactivation of early Oedipal longings";[53] that is to say, the desire of a young boy for his mother, or of a young girl for her father. We would then just need to reinterpret the grandmother as the displaced obstacle represented by the mother and we'll have a girl wishing to crawl into bed with her father, *a wolf*. Or, we may follow a Girardian inspiration and doubt the mythical accusations Oedipus suffered. He never actually killed his father, the only survivor was clear about that; Laius was killed by many and Oedipus was alone when he killed the old man and *all* his crew at the crossroad (Sophocles, *Oedipus Rex*, 122–23). Therefore, since this first guilt was the only proof Jocasta and the people had to confirm the other one, Oedipus did not even lie with his mother. The accusations we have been told about to explain the events in Thebes are lies. This should be enough to find in the tragedy not so much the path of self-discovery of a man but the representation of a summary trial. Everybody is convinced by the despicable accusations, and the disease that is destroying Thebes is suddenly healed. The endogenous evil tearing down the community, a mixture of envy, violence, revenge, and chaos, is expelled along with Oedipus because everybody is convinced

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that he was the reason why the people hated each other. Every summary in every encyclopedia still presents the narrative matter of the events that occurred to Oedipus as if he were guilty of the mythical accusations he was put on trial for.[54] According to Girard, instead, Oedipus is the scapegoat—and the sacred king—of Thebes, spontaneously—or ritually—expelled to bear away the miasma the city was dying of. Then, in the words of Friedrich Ahl, Sophocles's tragedy is not so much a mise-en-scène of the myth but a "a *pièce* on the genesis of the myth."[55]

As far as Little Red Riding Hood is concerned, my intuition is that Hardwicke's interpretation is not aware of the process of unveiling of which it is nonetheless a milestone.[56] She certainly seems more interested in offering an adaptation inspired by psychoanalytical and by boudoir (or mass-media) taboos. One may say that the film itself is not clear on this point: on one side, it shows what brings a crisis about—sexual desires, betrayals, sudden rage, envy, resentment, vengeance. On the other, the theme of the werewolf produces an interesting effect of veiling revelation, or of blind revealing: every step toward a clear revelation of a victimary process induces a new and more absurd covering of the lynching. Hardwicke's adaptation never explicitly puts in doubt the existence of the werewolf, but she creates an adaptation whose plot doesn't really need it. The result is that the spectator is brought to blame the werewolf. Even if he is half human, even if he was cursed, even if he doesn't really want to kill, no one has identified with the wolf, yet. He is the villain, the beast hurting the young and beautiful girl, the public enemy that no one has ever listened to.

Sophocles never dramatizes Oedipus's crimes and that, also being a convention of ancient tragedy, may be his mastery. Had he been the director of this adaptation, we would be watching a movie showing the story of a village falling into a crisis of undifferentiation as a result of a sequence of crimes against morality, a betrayed husband, a misled father, a hindered love, a girl secretly and resentfully envied by her friends, maybe a masquerade party gone wrong, or even the death of one young girl; a crisis bringing along rage, resentment, vengeance, murders, and chaos. A father killing the proof of his humiliation, a man taking his revenge against his wife's lover. The more everyone tries to solve the crisis, the worse it gets. Everyone is trying to put things right: Cesaire was wiping out the fruit of the betrayal he had suffered and enacting vengeful reprisal on the father of his daughter. Father Solomon himself was trying to catch the culprit. The friends of Valerie were trying to put things right, too, restoring a fair

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competition between peers. The more twisted the crisis gets, the more polarized the endeavors. We would then behold a sequence of attempts to stop the crisis, eventually resorting to extreme measures: blaming the village idiot, an expendable victim, or the most beautiful girl in town, a wellspring of envies and jealousy; and finally blaming the drunkard or *any* of the villagers.

And this is precisely what we see in the film, except that everywhere the violence happens, the werewolf appears, too. A drunkard would not have been able to produce such a terrible outburst of violence, and so he must be something else: in the maze of the lynching someone would probably swear he saw the drunkard turning into a werewolf. The werewolf is nothing but the result of the projection of the endogenous evil, the mixture of envy, vengeance, and hatred that every single member of the community is experiencing but blaming on *someone else*.

In Hardwicke's adaptation, the hunter has been turned into a werewolf hunter that had "destroyed werewolves and witches all around the country" and made out of him a wonderful metaphor of the *sticky* dynamics of a crisis of undifferentiation. In a certain way we could see in this character an equivalent of the philosopher in Molière's famous *Bourgeois gentilhomme*.[57] In the comic plot of the French playwright, three teachers arguing about the merits of their respective disciplines find in a philosopher a judge who eventually gets caught in the very exchange of blows he was supposed to end. In *Little Red Riding Hood*, a village torn apart by vengeance calls an outsider to come and stop the cycle of violence, and instead he gets involved in the conflict and is killed. The community has to solve the crisis by itself, which, according to mimetic theory, is precisely what a collective and unanimous lynching can do. Clearly, this solution is the precise reversal of the first attempt. To solve an endogenous problem, they called an outsider, an exogenous solution. When this fails, they create a new outside on which to project the problem. This solves the internal crisis but puts the community in a new horrible condition: the *outside* will be there for them to worry about. The monster created by such an effervescent event will then become the sacred beast to wheedle with periodic offers of young girls or of cattle. Facing it in the woods will then be proof to become recognized as adult members of the village. And maybe, later on, when all of this will be forgotten, to make sense of some uneasy memories, they will tell the tale of a young girl being killed by a wolf: a simple sad story.

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The Brothers Grimm variant of the tale gives some other details that may sustain such a sacrificial and victimary interpretation. The hunter performs with his sharp knife something that looks a lot like a sacrifice; Bruno Bettelheim's interpretation of this scene is as clear as one could desire: "In the hunter's action, violence (cutting open the belly) is made to serve the highest social purpose (rescuing the two females)."[58] The hunter's cut is the administering of a small dose of violence, provided to stop the cycles of violence tearing apart the community. The wolf's death is even clearer in this regard: it does not die of having its belly cut open but in a scene that hides and reflects an *intensely* sacrificial sequence of punishments: it is *stoned* and drowned.[59] Under the terrible figure of the wolf, which is turned into a werewolf, we can now see the fragile features of a scapegoat, lynched and then turned into a monster.

More recently, Catherine Orenstein has focused on the werewolf issue, recalling that, at the end of the sixteenth century, the time when we believe the tale was making its first appearance, accusations and trials against werewolves were not rare or absurd but were a full-fledged "hysteria."[60] The werewolves, as the witches, were good and disposable solutions for issues of realpolitik but also for endogenous and unplanned *crises of undifferentiation*.[61] Famine, internal killing, unexplained deaths, occluded violence—everything can be washed away from a community plagued with a miasma casting all the blame on the werewolf. Nobody will ever go through those matters again because *the werewolf did it*.

Vladimir Propp had explained that the difference between a folktale and a myth is not formal or structural but pertains to the social function of the text. In this sense, the main variants of the tale "Little Red Riding Hood" may be hiding in their more or less common plot a myth, itself the tale of a lynching that has been covered up.

Thanks to this interpretation of Catherine Hardwicke's adaptation, beyond a *Bildungmärchen* focusing on an individualistic moral, we can now see the story told by a community to itself, the misrecognizing narration of *the events through which a community saved itself from itself, by expelling a part of itself*. Outside the mimetic-victimary paradigm inaugurated by René Girard, it would be hard to put together all these fragments without resorting to specious historical or psychoanalytical or pseudo-anthropological ad hoc explanations. This interpretation instead allows us to put all the pieces together and find a coherent diachronical evolution in four steps: a bourgeois moralistic tale sterilizing the narration of an initiation rite, sprung out of a human sacrifice,

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misrecognizing repetition of a collective lynching. It also tells us that by turning the "wicked man" into the hero, the tale helps the community to cope with its uneasiness with the idea of human sacrifice, but it also implicitly confirms the existence of the wolf and therefore of the exogenous nature of the evil that was tearing apart the community. So does the adaptation we have been dealing with: the village of Daggerhorn is saved thanks to the killing of the monstrous beast, a substitute victim in which everyone will then believe with stronger faith and that everyone will then fear. Yet the movie also tells something completely different to an educated and attentive eye, and this is the reason why it is so important to comment on a film adaptation of the tale. Thanks to the inherent possibilities of the filmic medium, Hardwicke can juxtapose two versions of the same event in one scene. The werewolf does not really take part in any of the main scenes of violence: it always is on scene when violence happens, but none of the main characters is killed by the beast. Those who fall are victims of superstition, hasty procedures, resentment, rage, or vengeance, killed by men and men only.[62] The problem is not coming from elsewhere; the real dangers come from inside: it is all about the relationships we entertain with each other. And this is the core meaning of every myth and every tale, as well as the main teaching of mimetic theory. When things get twisted and confused, when differences don't stand anymore, people will somehow cast all the blame for the spread of resentment on somebody who will therefore be punished and whose punishment will be covered up by despicable accusations. One may even go so far to say that this is the *Urmärchen*: when the villain is too black and all the others too white, something like a lynching goes on.

To answer those who quite surprisingly noticed that most of the myths do not explicitly show any lynching, René Girard introduced the distinction between those texts where the scapegoating is the *theme* of the narration and those in which the scapegoating is the *structuring principle* of the text. Using such categories, we may say that Hardwicke's film is moving along this line, deconstructing the tale and making the scapegoating resurface as *theme.* In doing so, she offers a cathartic and entertaining plot but also hints at *the endogenous origin of violence*. Her approach to the narrative matter at the same time covers the sacrificial theme with psychoanalytical inspiration and opens the way for a thorough deconstruction. It may be no more than a blind revealing, but it nonetheless represents a further step on this path.

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NOTES

I thank Paul Dumouchel, Roberto Salizzoni, Andrew McKenna, and Alessandra Diazzi for their precious comments and their generous revision of my manuscript.

1. See Jack David Zipes, *The Trials and Tribulations of Little Red Riding Hood: Versions of the Tale in Sociocultural Perspective* (South Hadley, MA: J. F. Bergin Publishers, 1983), the most complete collection of different variants of the tale.
2. For a complete review of the different versions, see Hans Ritz, *Die Geschichte vom Rotkäppchen. Ursprünge, Analysen, Parodien eines Märchens* (Kassel, Germany: Muriverlag, 2006).
3. Alan Dundes, ed., *Little Red Riding Hood: A Casebook* (Madison: University of Wisconsin Press, 1989). This work remains unmatched for the extensiveness of the survey of previous literature, to which we would not dare add anything nor dedicate any more space.
4. See Sigmund Freud, "On the Sexual Theories of Children," in *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud, Volume IX (1906–1908): Jensen's 'Gradiva' and Other Works* (London: The Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psychoanalysis, 1959), 205–26.
5. Erich Fromm, *The Forgotten Language: An Introduction to the Understanding of Dreams, Fairy Tales, and Myths* (New York: Reinhart, 1951).
6. Bruno Bettelheim, "Little Red Cap and the Pubertal Girl," in Dundes, *Little Red Riding*, 168–91; and Bruno Bettelheim, *The Uses of Enchantment: The Meaning and Importance of Fairy Tales* (New York: Knopf, 1976).
7. See also Karl-Heinz Mallet, *Kennen Sie Kinder? Wie Kinder denken, handeln und fühlen, aufgezeigt an vier Grimmschen Märchen. Nachwort Bruno Bettelheim* (Hamburg: Hoffmann and Campe Verlag, 1981).
8. Bettelheim, "Little Red Cap," 168.
9. And this was also the final opinion of Marianne Rumpf's quite influential Ph.D. dissertation, at least in the field of Little Red Riding Hood studies; see Marianne Rumpf, "Rotkäppchen: eine vergleichende Märchenuntersuchung" (Ph.D. diss., University of Göttingen, 1951).
10. I am aware of the mostly satirical versions collected by Hans Ritz, which play on an inversion of the roles: for example, we have a poor innocent wolf being abused either by Little Red Riding Hood or the hunter or the grandmother (see Iring Fetscher's ironic interpretation of the tale: *Rotkäppchen und die Wölfe, Wer hat Dornröschen wachgeküßt? Ein Märchen-Verwirrbuch* [Hamburg, Germany: Classen, 1972]), but this kind of inversion is not what my interpretation is aiming at.
11. See Glauco Carloni, "La fiaba al lume della psicanalisi," *Rivista di psicanalisi* 9 (1963): 169–86, esp. 177–86; Anselmo Calvetti, "Tracce di riti di iniziazione delle fiabe di Cappuccetto Rosso e delle tre Ochine," *Lares* 46 (1980): 487–96; Yvonne Verdier, "Le Petit Chaperon Rouge dans la Tradition orale," *Le Débat* 3 (1980): 31–61; and, more recently, Sandra

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Bosco Coletsos, *I riti di iniziazione all'età adulta nelle fiabe dei fratelli Grimm* (Alessandria, Italy: Edizioni dell'Orso, 2003), 17–31.

12. Vladimir I͡A Propp, *Istoricheskie Korni Volshebnoĭ Skazki* (1946; repr., Saint Petersburg: Izd-vo S.-Peterburgskogo universiteta, 1996).
13. Paul Saintyves, *Les Contes de Perrault* (Paris: Émile Nourry, 1923).
14. In which Fromm sees a symbol of the danger of losing virginity.
15. In which Bettelheim sees an unconscious desire to get rid of the grandmother, considered a sexual rival.
16. Both Fromm and Bettelheim focus on the color of the cap, the former considering it a symbol of menstruation, the latter the color of passion and sexual desire. According to Robert Darnton, though, the color of the cap is a quite late interpolation of the oral tale and not at all an essential detail. See Robert Darnton, *The Great Cat Massacre and Other Episodes in French Cultural History* (New York: Basic Books, 1999). See also Paul Delarue, *Le Conte Populaire Français* (Paris: Maisonneuve et Larose, 1957), 374.
17. See Darnton, *The Great Cat Massacre*.
18. Catherine Orenstein, *Little Red Riding Hood Uncloaked: Sex, Morality, and the Evolution of a Fairy Tale* (New York: Basic Books, 2003).
19. Alan Dundes, "Interpreting 'Little Red Riding Hood' Psychoanalytically," in *Little Red Riding Hood*, 206.
20. See Saintyves, *Les Contes de Perrault*. It goes without saying that this rite also could have been deconstructed and reduced to its orginary form, at least according to a Girardian, but also a Hocartian reading. See, for example, Lucien Scubla, "Préface," in *Socials Origins,* by M. A. Hocart (1954; trad. fr. par Jean Lassègue avec la collaboration de Mark R. Anspach, *Au commencement était le rite. De l'origine des sociétés humaines* [Paris: La Découverte, 2005]), 12–53; and Lucien Scubla, "Roi sacré, victime sacrificielle et victime émissaire," *Revue du MAUSS* 22, no. 2 (2003): 197–221.
21. Dundes, *Little Red Riding Hood*, 71.
22. See Propp, *Istoricheskie Korni*, chap. 3, § 3.
23. To dispel any surprise about Perrault's version being later than the Brothers Grimm one, I'll quote Dundes, who in a note recalls that "comparative studies of many, many versions of a given tale type can establish with reasonable certainty what some, if not all, of the most ancient traits or details of a tale are or were." Dundes, *Little Red Riding Hood*, 228.
24. This doesn't mean answering affirmatively the question asked by Georg Hüsing; Little Red Riding Hood is not a myth, but maybe it was. See Georg Hüsing, "Is Little Red Riding Hood a Myth?" in Dundes, *Little Red Riding Hood*, 64–70.
25. Catherine Orenstein recalls that in French "when a girl loses her virginity it was said that *elle avoit vû le loup*—'she'd seen the wolf.'" Orenstein, *Little Red Riding Hood Uncloaked*, 26.
26. See Dundes's fine considerations on this topic in his "Interpreting 'Little Red Riding Hood' Psychoanalytically," 192–95.

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27. This very idea of Propp's reducing the diachronical evolution of rites to a simple change in a community's needs is the clearest sign of the influence of Marxism in his research. According to a Girardian analysis, this would be a functionalist or even simply positivist reading of the matter. I don't have the space to deal suitably with this issue.

28. Propp, *Istoricheskie Korni*, chap. 1, § 9.

29. Italo Calvino, *Fiabe italiane* (Turin: Einaudi, 1956).

30. See René Girard, *Violence and the Sacred* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1979), 6.

31. Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*, 4.

32. According to Girard the first subject is the one who is *subjected* to a stoning, or whatever kind of lynching. Then, it will be the one who can speak through its lynching. See René Girard, *The Scapegoat* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1989); and E. Antonelli, "Mimesis e Anerkennung. Fenomenologia mimetica della genesi dell'autocoscienza," *Trópos: Rivista di ermeneutica e critica filosofica* 6, no. 1 (2013): 79–96.

33. See René Girard, *Things Hidden since the Foundation of the World* (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1987).

34. Girard has written extensively on this matter and many other scholars have been writing about mimetic theory at large in the last five decades. The main ideas of the now-famous mimetic theory as far as the essence of religion is concerned can be very roughly summed up as follows: religion is the sum of rites, taboos, and myths. All of them share the same origin, a unanimous and spontaneous scapegoating of a member of a community torn apart by a social crisis, upon which all the blame is cast. This event is produced by the so-called *mimetic-victimage mechanism* under a very special condition: *la méconnaissance*, the misrecognition of the scapegoating process. Everybody is convinced of the guilt of the one they are lynching. Later, the event that brought back peace and order will be recalled as *transcendent*, or mythical. They will then tell stories about a *fascinating* being who brought *tremendous* troubles to the community and then, after having offered the fundamental rules of the culture, flew away (down a cliff) or swam away (drowned) or was transformed into something else. Whenever such a social crisis will explode anew the community will try to repeat all the steps of that *first* solution, interpreting as it comes, sacrificing somebody, some animal, or something. See as an introduction Michael Kirwan, *Discovering Girard* (London: Darton, Longman and Todd, 2004).

35. I am aware of seemingly similar interpretations and variants of the tale based on the notion of scapegoat, yet they are exactly opposite of what I will argue in the following pages. For example, Jack Zipes commented on H. I. Phillips's version of "Little Red Riding Hood" "as a Dictator would tell it," in which portraying the girl as a "vile provocateur and an agent of capitalistic interests . . . the wolf/Hitler can rationalize all his aggressive actions and pretend to be fighting for common peace and happiness in the world," yet here the one who is caught in the structure of the victimary mechanism, consciously and intentionally used by the dictator, is Little Red Riding Hood; even if as the scapegoat she still is the main character, which is not what my interpretation will maintain. This kind of interpretation just plays on the rehabilitation of the girl as an

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active subject of the tale against every male chauvinist reduction of Little Red Riding Rood to an innocent, naive, and passive character. They don't suspect that the scapegoat may be someone else. The same goes for Zipes's comment on Evgenii Shvarts's Marxist dramatization. Jack Zipes, *The Trials and Tribulations of Little Red Riding Hood* (London: Routledge, 1993), 56–58.

36. Dundes, "Interpreting 'Little Red Riding Hood' Psychoanalytically," 193.

37. Angela Carter, "The Company of Wolves," in *The Bloody Chamber: And Other Stories* (London: Gollancz, 1979).

38. *Red Riding Hood*, directed by Adam Brooks.

39. There are other almost uncountable adaptations, from the Mexican *Caperucita Roja*, directed by Roberto Rodriguez, to the recent *Red Riding Hood—The not so kind version*, directed by James Cimini.

40. Rebecca Keegan, "'Red Riding Hood' Director Catherine Hardwicke Explains the Big, Bad Sexy Secret," *Los Angeles Times*, November 19, 2010.

41. Keegan, "'Red Riding Hood' Director."

42. Suffice it to recall that Perrault's version was far more sexy, intriguing, and titillating than one can imagine a seventeenth-century tale to be, starting from the engraving that accompanied it.

43. See Mikel J. Koven and Sharon R. Sherman, *Folklore/Cinema: Popular Film as Vernacular Culture* (Logan: Utah State University Press, 2007).

44. My methodological option would have been to comment on a third-party summary in order to avoid any risk of interpolating the narrative matter with my theoretical assumptions, but unfortunately the only (detailed enough) available one is on the popular but not reliable Internet site Wikipedia. Therefore I will provide a summary as faithful as possible to the movie plot and then, separately, comment on it.

45. It is relevant to note that this variation has clearly been inspired by a certain dark fantasy atmosphere that has thrived in recent Hollywood productions (Di Caprio's idea is quite a clear hint in this direction and, above all, Catherine Hardwicke is the director of the famous *Twilight* saga), but it is not a twisting of the original tale—if anything like an original version of the tale has ever existed; according to Marianne Rumpf and to the twentieth-century French folklorist Paul Delarue, the werewolf theme was widespread already in seventeenth-century variants. See Paul Delarue, "Le Petit Chaperon Rouge," *Bulletin folkrorique d'Ile de France* 13 (1951): 257–59; and Rumpf, "Rotkäppchen." I will come back to this central issue later in the text.

46. Stefano Calabrese, *Cappuccetto Rosso: una fiaba vera* (Rome: Meltemi, 2008), 12.

47. Twins, mirrors, floods or mazes, mermaids, and the Sphinx, just to list a few, all have the same meaning and function according to Girard.

48. The brazen bull, also know as Phalaris's bull, was a torture and execution tool invented in ancient Greece. Its designer, Perillos of Athens, proposed it to Phalaris, the tyrant of Akragas, in Sicily, as a new means of executing criminals. The bull was hollow, made of bronze, with a door on one side. The condemned was locked inside and a fire was set

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under it, heating the metal until it became tremendously hot, eventually roasting to death the person inside.

49. Masks like this one were commonly used from the twelfth to seventeenth centuries as punishment for those who had committed crimes against the community, all over Europe, but essentially in regions from where the tale of Little Red Riding Hood is supposed to have originated, the Alps, in France, Germany, and Italy. See Silvia Pedone, "Smascherare e mascherare la 'vergogna' con le immagini," in *Sensibilia 5*, ed. Emanuele Antonelli and Manrica Rotili (Milan: Mimesis, 2012), 269–88; and Francesco Sorce, "La vergogna delle immagini infamanti," in *Sensibilia 5*, 311–35.

50. There are variants of this tale—the Italian one, for example—that present details much appreciated by those critics fascinated by the cannibalistic theme, in which the wolf eats up the grandmother and with the "leftovers" prepares a soup to offer to Little Red Riding Hood.

51. See Arthur. M. Hocart, *Kings and Councillors: An Essay in the Comparative Anatomy of Human Society* (Cairo: Printing Office P. Barbey, 1936); and A. M. Hocart, *The Progress of Man: A Short Survey of His Evolution, His Customs and His Works* (London: Methuen, 1933).

52. Girard has been writing about Oedipus since the 1960s, and his interpretation is well known and nowadays more and more considered. See René Girard, *Oedipus Unbound: Selected Writings on Rivalry and Desire*, with an introduction by Mark R. Anspach (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2004); and Girard, *Violence and the Sacred*.

53. Dundes, *Little Red Riding Hood*, 218.

54. For example, see the entry for Oedipus in the authoritative and influential Pierre Grimal, *Dictionnaire de la mythologie grecque et romaine* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1979).

55. Friedrich F. Ahl, *Sophocles' Oedipus: Evidence and Self-Conviction* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1991), 264.

56. She declared she drew inspiration from Bettelheim's *The Uses of Enchantment*; see Keegan, "'Red Riding Hood' Director." Girardians have debated about Sophocles's cognizance of Oedipus's innocence; see Sandor Goodhart, "Lestas Ephaske: Oedipus and Laius's Many Murderers," In Sandor Goodhart, *Sacrificing Commentary: Reading the End of Literature* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1996), 13–41.

57. See René Girard, "Perilous Balance: A Comic Hypothesis," *MLN* 87, no. 7 (1972): 811–26.

58. Bettelheim, "Little Red Cap and the Pubertal Girl," in Dundes, *Little Red Riding Hood*, 181.

59. The movie assimilates in the death of the werewolf the two killings of the Brothers Grimm version.

60. Orenstein, *Little Red Riding Hood Uncloaked*, 96.

61. Looking for the historical origin of the tale, Catherine Velay-Vallantin intriguingly investigates the behind-the-scenes events of one of the most renowned *fait divers* involving a werewolf-like *beast*: the legend of *La Bête de Gévaudan.* Concerning the

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unfortunate matter that occurred at the end of the eighteenth century, Velay-Vallentin hints both at a spontaneous *invention* of a werewolf-y beast to justify the reiterated failures of the attempts to catch the culprit of numerous sensational killings and at a strategic use, perpetrated by the local bishop, of a demonic figure sent to purify the *second and third generations* sprung out of the *camisards*, the French Huguenots who raised an insurrection against the persecutions that followed the revocation of the Edict of Nantes in 1685. See Catherine Velay-Vallantin, "Little Red Riding Hood as a Fairy Tale, *Fait-divers*, and Children's Literature: The Invention of a Traditional Heritage," in *Out of the Woods: The Origins of the Literary Fairy Tale in Italy and France*, ed. N. L. Canepa (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1997), 306–51.

62. In the film, Claude, the captain's brother, Father Auguste, Father Solomon, and even Cesaire are killed by their fellow humans. Those who are killed by the werewolf are only unnamed background actors.

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